

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 19
Issue 1 *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*

Article 2

May 2015

Vietnam 40 Years After the War

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Recommended Citation

Sutton, Sean (2015) "Vietnam 40 Years After the War," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* : Vol. 19 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol19/iss1/2>

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Vietnam 40 Years After the War

Sean Sutton, photographer and international communications manager for MAG, provides a photographic essay of Mines Advisory Group's (MAG) clearance work in Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces, Vietnam.

by Sean Sutton [MAG]



MAG has cleared three 40 mm grenades from Mrs. Rua's garden.
All photos courtesy of Sean Sutton/MAG.

Nearly 40 years after its war with the United States ended, Vietnam continues to be plagued by explosive remnants of war (ERW), particularly cluster munitions (known as **bombies** in Vietnam). According to the *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor 2013*, the Vietnam government reports that "ERW affects 63 provinces and cities" impacting approximately one-fifth of its land, with the central provinces suffering from the worst contamination. With a population of nearly 90 million people, Vietnam has the highest population density in the region; every square meter of land is precious.

Since 1999, MAG (Mines Advisory Group) has implemented clearance projects in Vietnam's heavily contaminated central provinces. MAG's current projects are based in Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces, located on opposing sides of

the former demilitarized zone that once divided northern and southern Vietnam. These provinces demonstrate poverty rates far higher than the national average among populations that are predominantly reliant upon agricultural and farming activities for income.

In 2013, MAG cleared 164,498 sq m (40.65 ac), removing and destroying 15,340 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and 2,615 cluster munitions. MAG also performed 15,189 explosive ordnance disposal spot tasks, directly helping 606,062 men, women and children in Vietnam.

MAG's completed clearance projects include grounds for Trung Hoa Kindergarten (a new school in Quang Binh province) and gardens around homes in Tan An village in Quang Nam province, Kim Nai village, Moc Dinh village, and Le Thuy district in Quang Binh province. During the



A BLU 26 cluster bomb submunition (bombie) sparkles in the sand. Bombies, which are very unstable, are particularly attractive to children.



Community liaison team members collect information from Mr. Nam about contamination in his garden.



Mr. Nam watches as MAG technicians clear his garden.



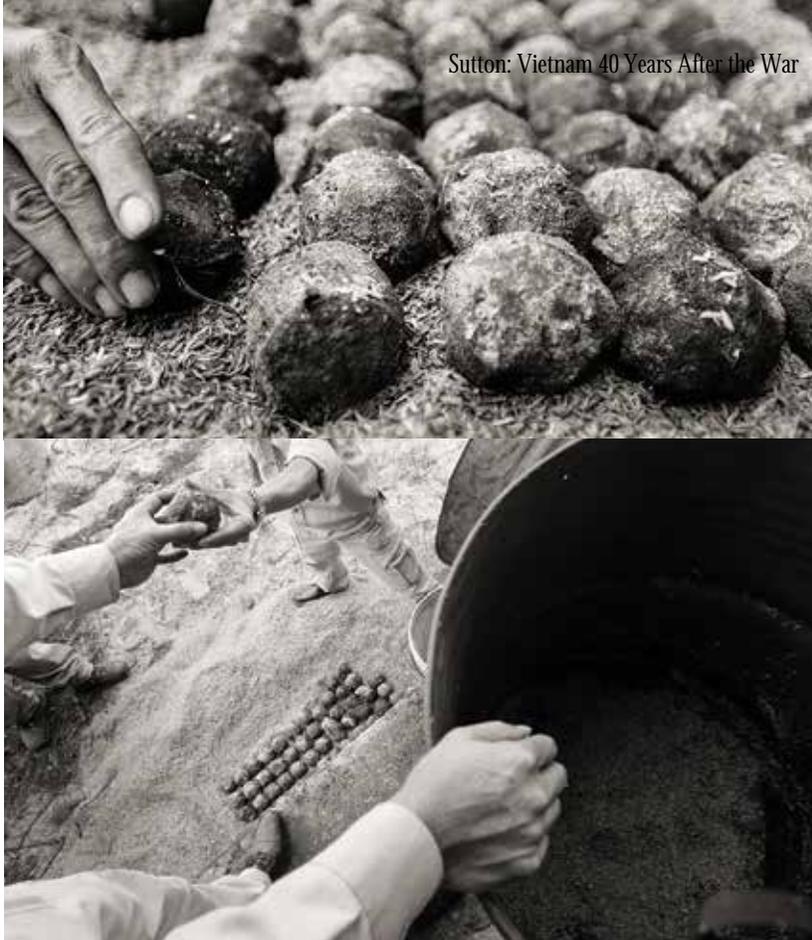
Mine Action Team 4 is clearing a garden in Kim Nai village in Quang Binh province using a large loop detector. Wooden pickets are placed to mark the location of potential UXO picked up by the detector. These threats are then investigated.



MAG technicians prepare to destroy ordnance found in a controlled demolition. Kim Nai village, Quang Binh province.



Technical field manager Daniel Dobbs carefully places an abandoned 40 mm grenade into a bucket of sand in order to transport it to the demolition site. These grenades are notoriously dangerous due to their sensitivity and claim lives every year in Vietnam.



Nearly 1,000 cluster bomb submunitions were found by the community and stored by the local military before transport to the demolition site on the beach nearby. Moc Dinh village, Le Thuy district.



Sean Sutton is an award-winning photo-journalist; his well-known pictures show the impact of landmines and ERW on communities and have been published and exhibited all over the world. His book documenting how UXO affects people in Laos was runner-up for the Leica European Publisher's Award. Sutton is MAG's international communications manager and has worked for the organization since 1997.

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clearance process, MAG's community liaison (CL) teams went house-to-house to ask families whether they were affected by ERW. The CL teams showed the villagers a picture book of ERW for identification to determine areas that needed clearance.

"This is our ancestral land and we want to build a house here, but we can't," said Mr. Nam. "I was digging for making cement and found bombs and mortar bombs. There is an old bunker under the ground here, and I am worried. Old people [in the village] told me this is the place people would put unexploded bombs when they found them in the village." Sixty-three percent of beneficiaries from MAG's clearance activities reported between 2011 and 2013 that being able to use land productively was the most significant outcome of clearance.¹

After MAG cleared three 40 mm grenades from her garden, Mrs. Rua, who

lives in Quang Nam province, said "When we dug behind our house, we found a grenade. And then just a few months ago after heavy rain, we saw another one. We were very scared for the safety of the children. Both my husband and I work so we can't watch the children all the time. It caused us a lot of fear and worry. We told the children to keep out of the garden, but sometimes we would catch them playing there. Now I am very thankful my children will be safe." More than 70 percent of those benefitting from MAG's clearance activities reported that improved psychological safety is one of its most important impacts.¹

MAG Mine Action Team 4 cleared 7,645 sq m (1.89 ac) in October 2012. They found 20 projectiles (rockets and shells), mortar bombs and grenades. Ha Thanh Village Primary School was then built on the cleared land and opened in February 2013. Mrs. Chung, one of the

teachers, said "Thanks to MAG we now have a new school in the village. Before, students had to travel a long way to another village and that school was overcrowded. We are so very grateful and it means a lot to the community. Forty-seven children now go to school here and they are very happy indeed."

MAG remains committed to its goal of making Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces free from the impact of cluster munitions. With sustained levels of funding and a supportive constructive operating environment, MAG believes that this goal is obtainable within a 10-year period. ©

See endnotes page 65

Note: Funding was provided by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), Irish Aid and the U.K's Department of International Development (DFID).